

Horrifying medical reports have been published on the physical damage incurred by workers in the eleven PVC plants in the Federal Republic.

They are to be found in a paper produced by the North Rhine-Westphalia Health Ministry entitled *Diseases Caused by Vinylchloride*.

It is a special item in the 1974 annual report by the State-run industrial inspection board and includes a special investigation into the disastrous effects of PVC gases in view of diseases contracted by workers who have since died.

At least 50 people involved in PVC production have died from cancer caused by poison.

In all 225 deaths were investigated. Amongst this number were eleven suicides. In some cases it is almost certain that the workers killed themselves because they could not stand the long drawn out suffering involved.

These 225 cases cover all deaths during a certain period, however, and naturally some who died in other ways as well.

The aim of the investigation was to establish the proportion of deaths caused by PVC to those caused by other factors. It was only a few years ago that doctors discovered this terrible new occupational illness and the dangers involved in the production of PVC which is the most popular plastic in use nowadays.

It is stated in the report that the poison contained in the gases given off by PVC can give rise to cancer.

In his report on the patient Theodor L., born in 1930 and employed from 1956 to 1958 at the PVC plant, Dynamit Nobel

Distressing industrial death toll of PVC

Troisdorf, the industrial inspection board doctor stated "The patient had never been ill before. It was only in 1968 that he began to feel a pain in his chest. Within a few months Theodor L. was past all hope of recovery. The poison had raged in his body for far too long, his liver had been eaten up and cancerous tumours had been formed."

"Apart from vomiting large amounts of blood the patient's subjective condition was relatively good. In the end it was possible to feel tumours the size of a fist under the abdominal wall which was swollen with excess liquid caused by oedema. He died on 25 January 1969 from heart failure."

Theodor L. received treatment from the liver specialist, Professor Gültgemann from Bonn, but even this could not save him. Death occurred just as quickly in the case of Alfred U., foreman in a factory in the south of the Federal Republic. He too was born in 1930. To quote the report by the Freiburg industrial inspection board doctor, "In March the patient suddenly began to feel pains in the upper stomach. His liver which had previously been a normal size became very enlarged. Above the liver a systolic movement could be discerned. At this stage the patient was transferred to a hospital in Lörrach where a tumour of the liver was diagnosed. Despite every

effort to save him the patient died on 10 October 1973.

The Munich industrial inspection board doctor made the following report on Johannes S., of the same age who was a boiler cleaner in a PVC factory in the south of the country: "April 1974 - first signs of illness provoked by PVC. Later a certain weakness in the arms. Heavy bleeding of the stomach. Diagnosis: malignant tumour in the liver. Extensive bleeding in the tumour. Blockage of the spleen." Johannes S. died at the end of November 1974.

Other reports also show the cause of death to be cancer of the liver as a result of PVC poisoning. Evidence of other malignant tumours was also discovered in people with PVC illnesses or those who had died. It is an insidious poisonous gas which also decomposes and alters the bone structure.

Despite increased control over regulations concerning the protection of those who work in this industry experts still do not agree on the maximum concentration of the gas which is permissible in areas where men are at work.

The former proportion of 500 parts of PVC gas to one million parts air has now been reduced to a maximum of 50 parts per million. In the United States PVC workers are required to wear gas masks when the 25 per million level is reached.

American authorities have more or less established the danger level at zero, yet the experts doubt whether the possibility of small amounts of the gas escaping can be entirely eliminated. *Hans Wüllenweber*

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